

# Boardman pushes interagency cooperation, supports smart growth

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in the most recent round of funds, we did 121 bike paths, we did 150 miles of railroad corridor for trails. Then there are historic preservation and restoration projects.

*The agency has been working with DEC on wetlands restoration and wetlands mitigation issues, especially for projects along the roadsides. Can you describe that effort?*

With the leadership that we have with the governor, and the leadership that we have at DEC, the kind of genuine relationship I think that's grown right now between DOT and DEC makes something like this, the wetland mitigation for roadside projects, much more than that.

One of the things we're doing with DEC is funding part of their mapping program to improve the information that we all have. The relationship that DOT has established with DEC with the leadership of Commissioner John Cahill has made many of these projects and restoration of wetland more than just what we have to do. It goes beyond that. We want to do the kind of thing that will develop a long-term legacy for the state that shows that we're making those investments with DEC that will improve the environment and the quality of life all over the state.

*You're a member of the governor's Quality Communities Task Force. What's your view of DOT's role in this emerging issue of smart growth and quality communities in New York?*

I attended the first task force roundtable meeting in Syracuse to listen to the business community, the environmental community and the local political leadership, and in all cases, there's a definite interest in making sure that our communities grow in such a way that the quality of that community is not damaged and is in fact enhanced by whatever state agency is involved in the process.

So what we need to do, as a transportation agency, which is unusual, I guess, is think about what is it that we have to have as a policy to make sure that rural landowners or those that can't develop for either single family growth or industrial development, are maintained in a way that they're protected.

An example of that was demonstrated in Syracuse with the Industrial Development Agency from Cortland, who went into an area right along Route 81 and bought the development rights from the farmer, which allowed that Industrial Development Agency to pay the farmer to make sure the land continued to be productive even though current prices were so low that that farmer could no longer survive on his own. In turn, the farmer didn't have to sell out to a truck stop mega-complex and facility that would offer a few

jobs, but not the kinds of jobs that that community thought that it needed for enhancing Cortland overall.

So working together, whether it's an Industrial Development Agency, or whether it's a Department of Transportation, or whether it's a developer, the development needs to be in areas that it's most suited to, quality communities. We can reuse things like brownfields and we can use existing transportation access.

Our real goal is to improve the quality of our communities and help make sure that local governments can have all the tools needed to create quality communities. To the extent that we can't do that, we won't be successful in this effort. And I know you, in the Audubon Society have been a tremendous supporter of this concept.

You want to make sure that we use the resources we have, and we should make sure that we are assisting local communities where they don't have the time or the expertise, or the confidence to make those kinds of planning decisions.

*New York has had a history of nonpoint pollution programs at DEC, Department of State and Department of Transportation. Describe your best management practices for nonpoint pollution and your efforts to combat this problem.*

Let me just share with you an example of what we're trying to do. On the Beaverkill in Rosco, we replaced miles of asphalt ditch with a grassed swale at our own initiative. So some of the things that we're trying to make happen are for best management practices, not just meet the law, but to do the kinds of things that we should do that go beyond that description. I want to make sure you understand that we've changed our ethic here at DOT, and we've been recognized for that change in our environmental ethic. We've changed our mission. Our Storm Water Management Handbook for the New York City watershed is another example of that.

I heard somebody say the other day that it's okay to be proud for a job well done. I think we've done a good job with changing the way that we do think about the environment in the department. It's a new ethic that's recognized, that what we're trying to accomplish here is to change the way we think.

Now, I credit George Pataki for saying to me, the Department of Transportation needs to change the way it's thinking about the way it does its job. I credit people like Gary McVoy and Michael Fleischer from my department for helping to change the way that the department thinks about the environmental projects that we do, all projects. All projects that we do today have, as an underpinning, a new engineering instruction. The people: the landscape architects; the environmental analysis folks; even the engineers, especially the ones that are

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more recent graduates from the engineering schools; were ready for a new message of what we were going to do, whether it was storm water runoff, or whether it was taking care of our communities and their environment. Some people say DOT's for the birds, but we emphasize that DOT is for the birds whether in the area of nonpoint pollution or other projects.

*Are there emerging issues that the Department of Transportation is now looking at as you implement this new ethic?*

The biggest one that's emerging is our ethic and our view in comparison to other DOTs across the nation. The pressures are similar across the nation, but the viewpoint is not the same. They haven't changed yet. Understand that when you talk about environmental streamlining, some of the DOTs across the country say environmental streamlining is saying that the environmental community needs to get out of the way of transportation projects. This is not the right view. The right view is that the environment is important when we do a transportation project, and it's not helpful, I don't think, for a DOT to be beating everybody over the head. Now, will it always work out just right? Will we always do the right thing? No, we won't. We'll make mistakes. But at least we're thinking the right way, and we're trying to make sure that that happens across the country.

Another emerging issue is that we want to do more proactive environmental projects under the *For the Birds*

theme. We are protecting Peregrine Falcon habitat on the Dunn Memorial Bridge and putting up Bluebird boxes on transportation routes, which is our state bird. These are the kinds of things that we've involved our workers in both paid — on paid time, and on unpaid time. We have worked with Boy Scout leaders getting their troops involved up in Utica in putting in Wood Duck boxes and other bird boxes.

Partnering more closely with other agencies is critical. I think that's an emerging issue, whether it's a Department of Agriculture, a DEC, a Parks Department, an ESDC who has tremendous pressure. Economic Development folks have tremendous pressure on them from the business community to have the lowest possible cost so that they need to work with us hand-in-hand to make early decisions on what needs to be done from an environmental standpoint.

And a lot of this is new stuff and we need input from the environmental community interested on how DOT can continue to meet its missions, to make sure that people have the ability to travel and have access and do those kinds of things safely. But also to make sure that the environmental part of what we do is balanced. We need that kind of input, we need those kinds of ideas.

*For more information on the NYS DOT Environmental Initiative, see their website at [www.dot.state.ny.us/eab/envinit.html](http://www.dot.state.ny.us/eab/envinit.html).*

## Planning for New York state's future

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